



steep

TM

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#1
MAR



SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

WILDSTORM.COM

Sean
2002

The problem with my story is that it has too many beginnings...

...and, as far as I can tell, no ending in sight.



Some people would say that's a good thing... every day a new beginning...



But for me, it's like going from one nightmare right into another.



And the main difference is that the waking nightmare has more blood, death and confusion...

So I guess that makes it feel more real in some ways...



...more real than my dreams.





But at least in my
dreams *sometimes*
I make it out alive.

OUT OF THE COLD

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EARLIER
THAT DAY...

YOU
WANTED TO
SEE ME,
SIR?



YES,
HOLDEN,
HAVE A
SEAT...

This is Tao--he may not
look like much but he's
one of the scariest mother-
fuckers ever created...



It's not like he's
some psycho-killer,
though.



He's more like a
brain surgeon, only
his voice is the
scalpel.

Tao doesn't rip
your guts out, he
makes you rip them
out on your own.



My meetings with him
are the only times I'm
thankful for my
"condition."

WE'VE GOT
A SLIGHT
PROBLEM,
HOLDEN...



...IT APPEARS
WE HAVE A SPY
IN OUR
ORGANIZATION.





HIS NAME IS *SIMON SANDFORD*, CODENAME: *NIHILIST*... I'M NOT SURE IF YOU'VE MET HIM...



IT... UH, IT DOESN'T RING ANY BELLS...



HIS *FILE* IS ON THE TABLE... PLEASE HAVE A LOOK.



UH, YEAH, I THINK I'VE SEEN HIM AROUND A FEW TIMES... AT SOME OF THE LARGER MEETS...



...LOOKS A LITTLE JOVIAL FOR A GUY CALLED THE *NIHILIST*, DON'T YOU THINK?

INDEED.



I'VE HAD MY SUSPICIONS ABOUT SANDFORD FOR SOME TIME NOW... TOO MANY INCONSISTENCIES IN THE MISSIONS HE'S BEEN A PART OF...

TOO MANY AGENTS ON THE OTHER SIDE LEFT ALIVE...



AND IF I'M CORRECT, HE'S PROBABLY THE ONE WHO TIPPED OFF THE WILDCATS A FEW MONTHS AGO AND NEARLY GOT YOU KILLED...

...DURING THAT UNPLEASANT INCIDENT WITH YOUR FORMER MENTOR.



I WOULDN'T EXACTLY CALL LYNCH MY MENTOR...



WELL, HE CERTAINLY DIDN'T INSPIRE MUCH LOYALTY IN YOU, BUT I THINK HE WOULD ARGUE THE POINT...



AND MAYBE IF HE EVER GETS OFF LIFE SUPPORT, WE CAN ASK HIM...

...RIGHT BEFORE I FINISH THE JOB YOUR MAN COULDN'T.



HOW ONE MAN CAN INSPIRE SO MUCH HATRED IN HIS UNDERLINGS... I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND IT.



OH, I THINK YOU UNDERSTAND IT PERFECTLY...

NOW, CAN WE STICK TO THE SUBJECT, PLEASE? IS THIS NIHILIST GUY REALLY CONNECTED TO LYNCH?



WELL, THAT'S FOR YOU TO FIND OUT, HOLDEN... I'M PUTTING YOU TOGETHER WITH SANDFORD ON AN ASSIGNMENT TONIGHT.

YOU'RE TO ASCERTAIN THE TRUTH ABOUT HIM, AND DO WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE.



AND IF HE'S NOT DIRTY?

THEN WE'VE
GOT A REAL
PROBLEM,
DON'T
WE?

BECAUSE IF
IT'S NOT
SANDFORD, THEN
WHO IS IT?



RIGHT. I'LL DO
WHAT NEEDS TO
BE DONE...

I KNEW
I COULD
COUNT ON
THAT.





FUCK IT...

Why the hell should I care what happens to this asshole?



It's not like he's exactly innocent...



...he's just not the spy.



SKSSH!

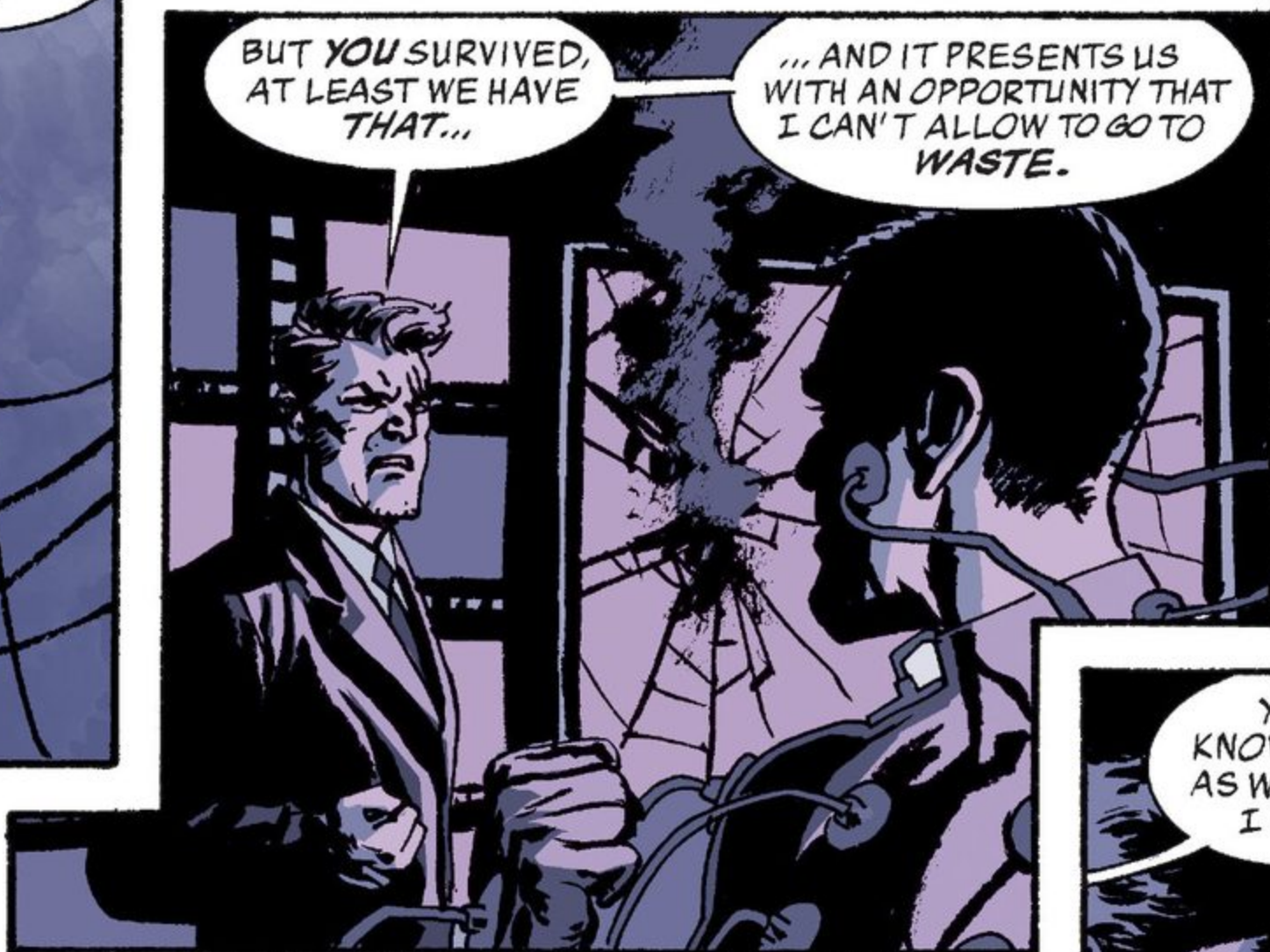


WHAT THE HELL'VE YOU *DONE* TO ME, OLD MAN?





I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING; I'M AFRAID YOU DID IT ALL TO YOURSELF, MY BOY...



BUT YOU SURVIVED, AT LEAST WE HAVE THAT...

... AND IT PRESENTS US WITH AN OPPORTUNITY THAT I CAN'T ALLOW TO GO TO WASTE.



YOU KNOW THAT AS WELL AS I DO.



John Lynch-- another complete bastard.

Four years ago, Lynch was one of the top men at International Operations, a covert government organization that made the CIA look like the IRS...



And Tao was right, he was my mentor... he was right that I hated him, too...

Just not for the reasons he thought I did...



DUDE, WHAT THE
FUCK HAPPENED TO
YOUR CAR?

WHAT?

YOUR FUCKIN'
WINDOW IS ALL
SMASHED TO
SHIT...

POPULATION
CONTROL

AH, YEAH, SOME
KIDS THREW A
BOTTLE FROM A
PARKING GARAGE...

WHAT'D
YOU DO?

NOTHING,
THEY WERE
JUST KIDS...

DUDE, THAT CAR IS A
FUCKING CLASSIC...

IT WAS MINE, THOSE
LITTLE PISS-ANTS WOULD
BEEN TOSSIN' THEMSELVES
OUT AFTER THAT BOTTLE!



And I don't doubt it...
over the last few years
I've watched Genocide
beat plenty of people
to near death for far
less than smashing
a window.

But he's more than just a hair-trigger bad-ass... in fact, sometimes I think he's like a living embodiment of black humor.

He told me once that he chose his codename because sometimes he really just wanted to kill everybody.



When I pointed out that genocide was actually the systematic annihilation of a group, based on race or creed, not just killing everybody...

...he said he was fine with going one group at a time...



...as long as he could start with cops.



LOOKS LIKE IT'S THREE GAMES TO NONE...

WHAT, WE'RE KEEPING SCORE NOW?



PURELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF SHAMING YOU... AND TAKING YOUR MONEY.

NOW PAY UP.



YOU SURE I WASN'T SOLIDS?





DON'T MAKE ME
ROLL YOUR STIFF,
GENOCIDE...



YEAH,
YEAH...



SO, YOU ON
A JOB
TONIGHT?

YEAH, I'M
MEETING
SOMEONE
HERE...



ACTUALLY,
THERE HE
IS RIGHT
NOW...



THAT GUY... WHAT'S
HE CALLED? THE
EXORCIST... OR...?

THE NIHILIST.



THAT'S IT.
HEARD HE
WAS A GOOD
GUY.



YEAH, WELL, DON'T GET
TOO ATTACHED...

YOU SHITTIN'
ME?



I SHIT YOU
NOT.



HEY, I'M THE
NIHILIST... ARE
YOU THE
CONDUCTOR?

UH, YEAH, BUT... CALL
ME HOLDEN, OKAY?

THIS IS
GENOCIDE
JONES.

YO.

YOU GOT
A REAL
NAME?

YEAH, BUT I
PREFER MY CODE-
NAME, REALLY...



SPILL IT,
MAN...

YEAH, COME ON, I CAN'T WALK AROUND ALL
NIGHT CALLIN' YOU *NIHILIST*... THAT'S
JUST... GAY...



I DON'T KNOW,
MAN, THERE'S
POWER IN NAMES,
YOU KNOW...
TRUTH IS POWER.



RELAX, *SIMON*, I'M JUST
FUCKING WITH YOU. I READ
YOUR FILE THIS
AFTERNOON...

YOU READ
MY FILE?
WHY?



I LIKE TO
KNOW WHO
I'M *WORKING*
WITH, THAT'S
ALL.

ANYWAY,
WE BETTER
GET A MOVE
ON...

UH,
YEAH,
SURE...



LATER,
SIMON...



...YA MUTT.



SO, I HEARD YOU
CAME OVER FROM
THE OTHER SIDE.

IS THAT
RIGHT?

WELL, THAT'S
WHAT I HEARD,
I DON'T KNOW IF
IT'S RIGHT...

I GUESS IT
IS... WHY?

JUST MAKING CONVER-
SATION, HOLDEN.

SO, WHAT
HAPPENED?

WHAT DID YOU
HEAR?

I HEARD THAT
YOU FOUND OUT
YOUR BOSS HAD BEEN
LYING TO YOU
ABOUT SOMETHING
BIG...

--YOUR FATHER'S
DEATH... IT'S ALREADY
BEEN TAKEN CARE
OF.

THE OFFICIAL
REPORTS HAVE BEEN
DOCTORED AND LEAKED
TO THE PROPER
SOURCES.

AGENT JAMES CARVER
DECEASED

YOU'RE TARNISHING MY
FATHER'S **MEMORY**?
HOW CAN YOU DO THAT?

YOUR **FATHER** KNEW
WHAT THE **GAME** WAS
ABOUT, HOLDEN...
HE'D UNDERSTAND...

AND
YOU NEED A
BELIEVABLE
MOTIVE.

HE LIED
ABOUT HOW
MY FATHER
DIED.

MY FATHER
WAS **EXECUTED**
ON SUSPICION OF
TREASON, UNDER
MY C.O.'S
ORDERS.

RIGHT, AND YOU FOUND
OUT THE TRUTH AND
TURNED ON HIM...

WENT ON SOME
CRAZY BLACK OPS
MISSION AFTER
SOME ALIEN
ARTIFACT--

I'M NOT EXACTLY
SURE. SOME
KIND OF DIMENSION
BETWEEN
REALITIES...

REALLY?
TRIP OUT.

YEAH, I COULD
NEVER ENTIRELY
GET MY HEAD
AROUND IT,
EITHER.

SO THEN I HEARD
YOU **KILLED** ALL
YOUR MEN AND
TOOK THIS **ARTIFACT**
FOR YOURSELF...

--AND ACCORDING TO
WHAT I.O. HAVE BEEN ABLE
TO TRACK, IT **APPEARS** YOU
WERE PAID A **PRETTY
PENNY** FOR IT BY A
MIDDLE EASTERN
EMIRATE...

THIS WAY, I DON'T HAVE
TO WORRY ABOUT **YOU**
APPROACHING **TAO**...
ONCE WE GET YOU OUT OF
HERE, HIS **PEOPLE** WILL
APPROACH YOU.

BECAUSE YOU'RE
ALREADY **ONE OF
THEM**.



OKAY,
ENOUGH
ABOUT ME,
SIMON...
THAT'S OUR
SIGNAL.

LET'S
MOVE.

WHAT'RE WE
DOING HERE,
CARVER? I THOUGHT
TAO HAD A TRUCE
WITH THE INTER-
NATIONAL TRIAD...

I GUESS HE'S
RENEGOTIATING
HIS TERMS.

ALL I KNOW IS HE
WANTS THIS INFORMATION
DUMP TAKEN DOWN,
HARD AND FAST.

SHOULD BE SIMPLE.
IT'S MOSTLY A SKELETON
CREW IN THERE NOW...

OR AT LEAST
IT WILL BE.

RIGHT.

YOU GOT
CYBERNETIC
LEGS OR
ARMS?

A
LITTLE OF
BOTH.

WHOOM!

GOOD. GET
THE DOOR.

WHAT DO
YOU THINK?
TWENTY
SECONDS?

OH, I DON'T KNOW. I THINK I
CAN DRAW THEIR ATTENTION AWAY
FROM THE BACK OF THE BUILDING
FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER.



BEEP



JESUS FUCK!
THIS PLACE'LL
BE SWARMING
WITH COPS IN
TWO
MINUTES!

RIGHT... THAT
SHOULD BE MORE
THAN ENOUGH
TIME.

THE
MAINFRAME
IS UPSTAIRS.



KRAK!KRAK!



**KABAM!
KABAM!**



YOU ALL
RIGHT?

YEAH, DON'T
WORRY ABOUT
ME...

CLEAR
THESE SIDE
ROOMS, I'LL
TAKE THE
MAINFRAME...



**KABAM!
KABAM!
KABAM!**



YAAH!



The mission is a cake-walk.
It's the kind of thing I.O.
would've used as a
training mission.

And I feel nothing,
taking out these
scumbags...They're
just high-tech
mobsters.
Shanghai Triad
gone worldwide,
with their hooks
in all over the
place.

I'm doing the world a favor
putting them back a few steps...
Though why Tao wants me to
is anybody's guess.

There never really seems
to be a clear method to
Tao's madness.

Then, right before I kill the
security monitors, I see
something that changes
everything about this night...

The Fucking
Nihilist is
copying some
of their
system info...

MOTHERFUCKER...

KSSHHH!

Suddenly I know why he was
asking so many questions
before...

TAO...YOU
FUCKING
BASTARD...

WE
CLEAR?

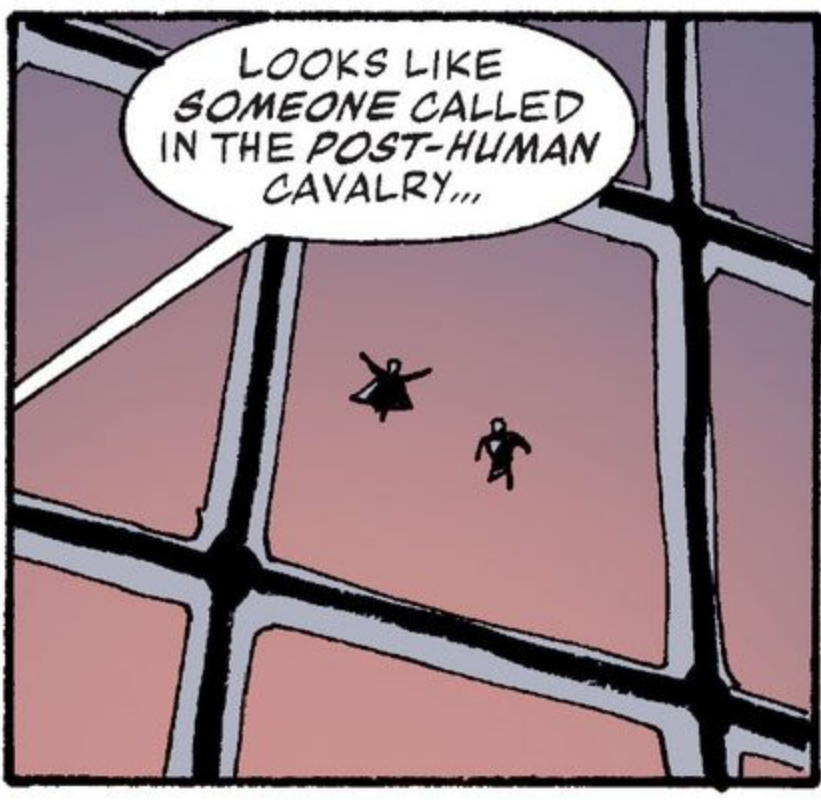
YEAH,
COME CHECK
THIS OUT...

WHAT?



SEE THOSE
TWO LITTLE
SPECS?

YEAH...



LOOKS LIKE
SOMEONE CALLED
IN THE POST-HUMAN
CAVALRY...



SHOULDN'T WE GET
THE FUCK OUT OF
DODGE, THEN?

WE'VE
GOT A LITTLE
TIME, STILL...

AND THERE'S
ONE LAST THING I
HAVE TO DO
HERE...

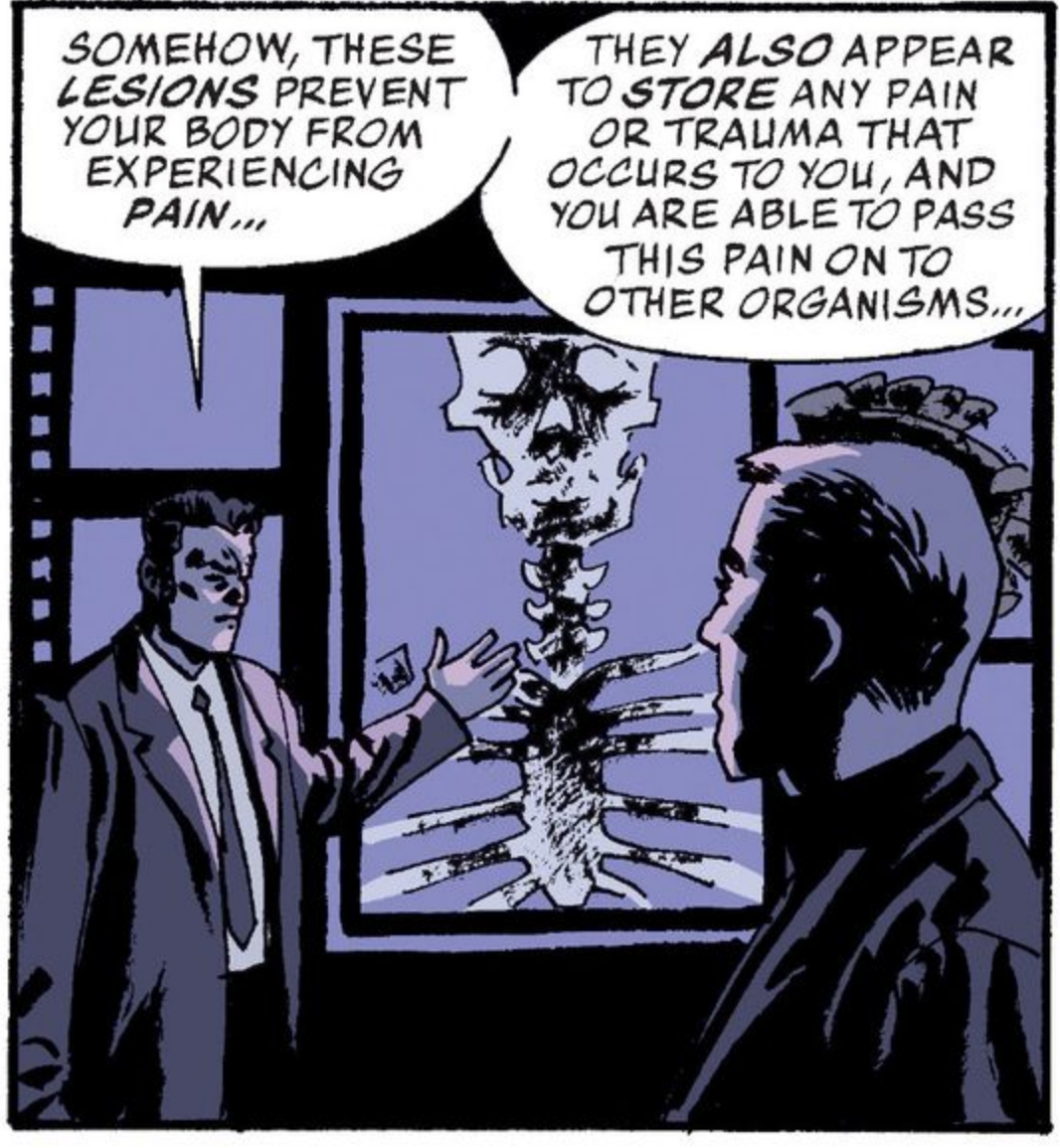


WHAT'S THAT? BECAUSE
THESE GUYS ARE NO
SPEEDING BULLETS BUT--

AHHHHH!



UUUUUNNNHHH...



OUR ANALYSTS
BELIEVE THAT THE
ARTIFACT WAS
ABSORBED INTO
YOUR BODY WHEN
YOU TOUCHED IT,
AND ATTACHED
ITSELF TO YOUR
NERVOUS SYSTEM
AS A LESION...

SOMEHOW, THESE
LESIONS PREVENT
YOUR BODY FROM
EXPERIENCING
PAIN...

THEY ALSO APPEAR
TO STORE ANY PAIN
OR TRAUMA THAT
OCCURS TO YOU, AND
YOU ARE ABLE TO PASS
THIS PAIN ON TO
OTHER ORGANISMS...

AS EVIDENCED
BY THE TRAGIC
DEATHS OF YOUR
TEAM MATES...

THE PAIN OF
ABSORBING THE
ARTIFACT WOULD'VE
MOST LIKELY KILLED
YOU IF THEY HADN'T
BEEN THERE FOR YOU
TO PASS IT ON.

SO, WHAT... I'M LIKE A
PAIN BATTERY OR
SOMETHING NOW?

MORE LIKE A
CONDUCTOR.

IS
THERE
A
CURE?

I'M SORRY...

Part of me wants to stay...
To whale on the supermen
for a while...

Or let them pound on me
until I can finally feel
something... So I can
end this nightmare...

But Lynch knew me too
well, I guess. Because
no matter what, I'm
a survivor.

That's my curse.

And the rest of my
life now are the
things he cursed
me with...

CARA, WHAT DID I
TELL YOU ABOUT INJURY
TO THE EYE?

HE GOT
HANDSY!

I DON'T CARE IF HE
STUCK A FINGER UP YOUR
BUTTHOLE, YOU DON'T--

But the thing is, I don't hate
Lynch for putting me out here...

For destroying my life, and
manipulating me into this
place... He was right, that's
all part of the game.

I made a pledge when I
joined I.O. to do what was
best for the country, no
matter what the cost, and
I believe in that... I do.

I don't even hate him for using my Father as part of his plan...

My Father was an asshole like Lynch and the rest of them.



No, it's nights like this that I understand why I hate Lynch...



DUDE, HOW'D THE MISSION GO?



... because he makes me wonder just what the hell I've become.



GOOD... IT WENT GOOD.

WHAT'RE YOU DRINKIN'?



ALTER EGO
EXCLUSIVES

